



## FARMERS SUICIDES IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT :

*The Indian farmers are in distress as the farmers did not get the remunerative prices for their agricultural produce. Majority of the farmers are in debt trap. As many as 6,351 farmers committed suicide in 2016 across India, or per cent 17 every day, according to the latest Home Ministry data. Suicides declined 21 per cent from 8,007, or 22 every day, in 2015, data show. Suicides in the farming sector declined 10 per cent from 12,602 in 2015 to 11,370 in 2016-- according to the reply to the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) by Parshottam Rupala, Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmer welfare, on March 20, 2018. The Minister's reply, based on provisional data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a division of the Home Ministry did not reveal the causes for suicides in 2016. "As per NCRB report of 2015, bankruptcy or indebtedness and farming-related issues are reported as major causes of suicides among farmers/ cultivators," the Minister said in his reply, "Family problems followed by illness are reported as major causes of suicides among agricultural labourers." Suicides of agricultural labourers increased 9 per cent to 5,019 in 2016 (14 every day) from 4,595 in 2015 (13 every day).*



**KEYWORDS :** *Indian farmers , Suicides of agricultural labourers , pathological social.*

### INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a pathological social happening. A normal human being will never venture into taking away one's own life in the normal course of societal living. He knows that the World which he lives in, is not given to him as a finished product. He struggles to eek out his living with nature and in the process if he finds his efforts failing repeatedly or any tragedy in life befalls on him and finds unable to cope up, he slips into desperation, seeks to escape from the troubles by taking away his life. Suicide is a human act self-inflicted, self-intentioned and untimely cessation of life. It is an act of self-destruction by a human being. It's an act, with a conscious wish, to be dead; his or her action carries out that wish. It implies that the motivation of the deceased may have to be inferred and his behaviour interpreted by others by suicide notes, spoken testimony or retrospective reconstruction of victim's intention, goal related to death rather than self-injury, self-mutilation or inimical self-reducing behaviour. On the whole, the farmers are committed suicides in nine states .An attempt is made to analyse the farmers suicides in India.

## PROBLEMS OF THE FARMERS

Farmers' suicide has become a problem since the dawn of this twentieth century, more so after globalization that was set in motion in the last decade of the twentieth century. Ever since the traditional societies were forcibly brought into within the framework of WTO agreement, the series of changes were initiated sequel to ensure globalization, liberalization and privatization to facilitate flow of capital and goods from all countries to all countries. The policy of liberalization opened up Indian economy and gave scope for free movement of agricultural produce and agricultural commodities for free trade. Licensing system and agricultural marketing check posts requirements have been relaxed, movement restriction have been lifted, selective credit control has been abolished and a model marketing act is proposed to allow farmers to buy pass the mandatory requirement of sale in the regulated markets. Similarly external trade policy was also liberalized during early 1990s. Thus the new economic policy advocated withdrawal of the state from economic sphere leaving it to the logic of market forces, while it might be a good thing for the industry to be allowed freely import the latest technology from abroad or have a competitive atmosphere leaving the agriculture sector to vagaries of free market could prove disastrous. The cycle of agricultural production is such that virtual the entire farm aid comes to the market simultaneously.

The economic reforms aimed to bring about a new world order but what happened was it brought into being neo-colonialism wherein the developed countries tried to dominate developing countries through trade and by making them to initiate rapid economic changes in their policies to be part of the new economic order. The developing countries soon began to experience the pressure of globalization in the form of buckling of their economic systems unable to cope up with the international competition which tried to flood markets throwing the indigenous goods awry. Agriculture has been the major casualty. The traditional practices were put aside in view of the promising better yielding varieties of seeds. India being a largest agricultural country has begun to reel under the pressure of new seed varieties. With no requisite institutional back up and technical know-how, the farming community began to adopt new practices borrowing money. The banks have closing doors of Institutional credit as part of structural adjustment, the farmers looked towards the private money lenders who readily came with credit at higher rates of interest fleeced the farmers and thus lured them into debt trap.

## CONTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURE TO GDP

Agriculture is synonymous with the word farming in India. Agriculture being an important sector of Indian economy supports more than fifty percent of the population. A cursory look at the timeline reveals that the contribution of agriculture after independence for initial two decades was 48 per cent and 60 per cent of GDP. It declined to 26 per cent in 2001-2002. In India majority of villagers are engaged in agriculture. Agriculture along with other allied activities like animal husbandry, forestry and fisheries is a dynamic and an important component of our economy that provides livelihood for more than 60 percent of the population. The contribution of agriculture to Indian economy in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is declining steadily, year by year due to the process of industrialization and the economic growth gathered momentum in different five year plans with the manufacturing and service sectors growing rapidly and agriculture limping along, the percentage share of agriculture in GDP reached a level of 17.8 per cent in 2007-08 (Ruddar and Sundaram, 2010). According to the Ministry of Agriculture (GOI) the GDP from agriculture, forestry and fishing for the year 2008-09 was 16 per cent (Anon, 2010). The share of agriculture and allied sectors in GDP for year 2009-10 was 14.6 per cent and for the year 2010-11 it was 14.2 per cent (Ruddar and Sundaram, 2010). The share of agriculture and allied sectors in GDP for the year 2011-12 was 14.4 per cent and for the year 2013-14 it was 13.9 per cent. Despite a steady decline of its share in GDP, agriculture is still the largest economic sector and plays a significant role in the overall socio-economic development of our country. According to data provided by Department of Economics and Statistics (DES) the food grain production for the year 2017-2018 is 272 million tonnes which is a good symptom for Indian economy, but the picture is not very rosy for farmers on the other side whose livelihood is agriculture. Farmers are facing distress due to many factors viz., vagaries of nature like flood, drought, erratic rainfall, cyclone, non-availability

of suitable inputs coupled with distressed sales, market glut and inflation. Thus the severe distress among the farmers has led to dramatic rise in the number of suicides among farmer community. The most tragic part of our country is the report of more suicidal deaths is among the farming community. The changes in the agricultural policy, increased cost of agriculture, the negative impact of globalization, liberalization and privatization on agriculture are some of the factors that are related to increasing suicidal tendency among farmers. Hence an attempt is made to examine the plight of the farmers and their suicides in India,

### FARMER SUICIDES IN INDIA

Historical records relating to frustration, revolts and high mortality rates among farmers in India, particularly cash crop farmers, date back to the 19th century but the cases of farmers suicide was rare. Ganapathi and Venkoba Rao analyzed suicides in parts of Tamil Nadu in 1966. They recommended that the distribution of agricultural organo-phosphorus compounds be restricted. Similarly, Nandi *et al.*, in 1979 noted the role of freely available agricultural insecticides in suicides in rural West Bengal and suggested that their availability be regulated. Hegde studied rural suicides in villages of northern Karnataka over 1962 to 1970, and stated the suicide incidence rate to be 5.7 per 100,000 population. Reddy, in 1993, reviewed high rates of farmer suicides in Andhra Pradesh and its relationship to farm size and productivity (Wikipedia). According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, more than 2,16,000 farmers suicides, 275516 farmers have committed suicide in India during the last one and half decade. The States which come either under dry zone or areas under rainfed agriculture have reported the highest number of suicides. The major states are Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh follow closely, with two thirds (68.4 percent) of farmer suicides being reported from these states. However, the NCRB figures across 18 years for which data exists how that at least 2,84,694 Indian farmers have taken their lives since 1995 (*i.e.*, accepting the non-figures of Chhattisgarh and West Bengal). The average annual farmers suicides is 15,369 over a period of 18 years. During the period 1997-2002, farmer suicides in the big five states accounted for roughly one out of every twelve of all suicides in the country. In 2003-08, it accounted for nearly one out of every ten. India saw 1,38,321 farm suicides between 1995 and 2003 at an annual average of 15,369. During the period 2004-12, the number is 14,66,373 at much higher annual average of 16,264. The annual average farmers suicides during 1995-2002 is the highest at 2,508 in Maharashtra followed by Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (2,304), Karnataka (2,259); while in the case of 2003-10 its place is the same as reported by Ashalata and Das.

During last nearly one year, of 9187 farmers committed who suicide in MP, over 21 per cent (1982) were from agriculture sector-farmers and farm labourers. This translates into one person committing suicide every hour and one farmer every five hours in the state over last one year. The growth of the farmers suicides in India is shown in the following table.

**Table-1**  
**Number of Farmers (Farming/Agricultural labourers) committed suicide**  
**During 2000 - 2017 in India**

S. No.	Year	No. of farmers committed suicide's	Percentage Growth in Suicides
1	2000	16603	-
2	2001	16415	-1.28
3	2002	17971	9.47
4	2003	17164	-4.49
5	2004	18241	6.27
6	2005	17131	-6.08
7	2006	17060	-0.41
8	2007	16632	-2.51

9	2008	16196	-2.62
10	2009	17368	7.23
11	2010	15964	-8.08
12	2011	14027	-12.13
13	2012	13754	-1.94
14	2013	11772	-14.41
15	2014	12360	4.99
16	2015	12602	1.95
17	2016	11370	-9.77
18	2017	12886	13.33
	<b>Total</b>	<b>275516</b>	

**Source:** Various issues of Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI), National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India & www.indiastat.com

The table above shows that there is a declining trend in the rate of the suicides of the Indian farmers. It is evident from the table above that the rate of farmers committed suicides has declined by 22.39 percent in 2017 when compared with 2000. The farmer suicides have accounted for 10 per cent of all suicides occurred in India (Times of India 2017). The suicides of Indian farmers are found highest during 2009 and 2014. The State-wise analysis reveals that nine States, i.e. Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab have accounted for 87.50 per cent of total suicides in agricultural sector of the country. Among the nine states Maharashtra is the worst affected State with about 11 thousand farmers have committed suicides between 1995-2016. The State wise farmers suicides have shown in table -2.

**Table - 2**  
**State - wise Farmers Suicides**

S.No.	States	2015	2016*	Percentage
1	Punjab	124	271	118.0
2	Haryana	162	250	54.32
3	Karnataka	1569	2079	32.50
4	Gujarat	301	408/	35.5
5	Madhya Pradesh	1290	1321	2.4
6	Telangana	1400	645	-54.0
7	Maharashtra	4291	3661	-15.0
8	Andhra Pradesh	916	804	-12.2
9	Chhattisgarh	954	682	-28.2
	Total	12602	11370	-9.8

The farmers who benefitted very lot from Green Revolution have also committed suicides in the states of Punjab and Haryana between 1995-2017, 4958 farmers have committed suicides in Punjab and Haryana between 1995-2016. The highest number of farmers who committed suicide is founded in Mansa District (1334) of Punjab between 1995-2016. The lowest number of farmers community who committed suicides is found in Punjab followed by Haryana and Gujarat. The small States like Chhattisgarh and Telangana have also severely affected with farmers suicides. On the whole, there is a considerable increase in the farmers suicides in Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka and Gujarat. There is a managerial increase in Madhya Pradesh between 2015 and 2016. There is a drastic decline in the rate of suicides in Telangana followed by Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh due the various farmers welfare measure like man waiving scheme, input subsidy, providing certified seeds by the Governments.

## REASONS FOR FARMERS SUICIDES

There are plenty of the reasons for the farmers suicides. In fact agriculture is not remunerative profession, so that more than 50 per cent of the owners of the landholding are left the profession and given their lands to the tenant farmers who are cultivate these lands. A comprehensive analysis of varied sources on the reasons for farmers suicide state that monsoon failure, climate change, high debt burdens, Government policies, mental health, personal issues and family problems if it is reviewed deeply increase in input costs like chemicals, seeds, fertilizers, which are to be purchased from outside, water crisis, interstate water disputes, dominance of money lenders and contractors over marketing channels are the most prominent factors responsible for farmers suicide. Further, family labour which was the most cost effective no cost investment earlier is not seen anywhere because of fragmentation of land holdings. Another complicated and indirect issue is India's urban consumer driven economic policies as the farmer has no control over price because of Essential Commodities Act, 1955. Most studies identified indebtedness as the predominant single factor associated with farmer suicides found that farmers in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra ranked debt as the most important reason for farmers suicides, followed by addictions, environmental problems, and price issues, amongst others. Dongre and Deshmukh (2012) Two other studies revealed that unpaid loans are a correlate of those who die by suicide. Kale (2011) in his study found that in a small sample from Vidarbha, 95 per cent of farmer suicide victims were indebted, while of control households, this was only 25 per cent.

The Indian farmer did not obtain the minimum support price (MSP) for the agricultural produce. Majority of the farmers (above 75 per cent) are small and marginal farmers who do not possessed the savings and have poor financial base as they are having land holdings below two hectares. The institutional credit agencies banking sector running their financial business in favour of large and big farmers. The banking sector has denied the loans to these weakest farmers. Hence, they are moved to the non-institutional credit agencies mainly moneylenders. With the poor economic basic, most of the small and marginal farmers have to take expensive loans, primarily from private lenders, to fund their farming process; interest rates can range from 30 per cent to 60 per cent, in many instances. Thus, the MSP is inadequate when loan servicing is brought into the equation, and the situation worsens in the context of crop failure for whatever reason.

The Indian farmers are then caught in debt traps. The debt cycle escalates. aggressive in nature, even bordering on the criminal. There has been a noticeable shift toward cash crops after economic liberalization. There is, additionally, an increased usage of expensive, commercial hybrid seeds in place of cheaper and hardier home-grown ones. Farmers in this segment are especially susceptible to financial risks associated with the vagaries of nature and of the agricultural market; they are also vulnerable to corporate. Many studies indicate that more than 70 per cent of farmer suicide cases occur among those engaged in cash crops, bringing debt, hyper commercialization, exploding input costs, water use patterns, and price volatility to the fore. On the whole, the suicide deaths are occurred due to failure of crops, the farmers inability to sell their agricultural produce. In fact, majority of the small and marginal farmers are faced shortage of godown, and marketing faculties. So that they have engaged in the distress sale of their agricultural produce at the farm level. As a result of it, they are unable to repay the loans. The maintenance of the family, health care and education of children and poverty forced the Indian farmer to commit suicides. Many cases of farmers suicide in India is a larger than other countries. The farmers of India committing suicide is increasing rapidly. Because of poor returns, increases cultivation cost, imperfect market conditions, unable to repay loans.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The Indian farmers have not been getting back the investment amount on cropping, purchase of seeds and fertilizers. The reasons for farmers suicide is corruption, spurious pests, seeds etc. The state Governments have implemented agricultural debt waiving scheme to prevent the farmers suicides. The small and marginal farmers could not able to benefit from those schemes. The Government should implement the recommendations of Swaminathan Committee Report on farmers, then only, the lives of the farmers can be saved. The subsidies and farmer welfare schemes of the Government should be

directly moved to the farmers. Then only agriculture sector will become remunerative profession for the cultivator.

The reason for farmers to commit suicide is corruption and the middlemen who earn more profit than farmers. The farmers not even get back the money which they used for purchase as seeds, and fertilizers and expenditure on agricultural operations.

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